



Hans van Meegeren, Forger

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Forgeries: An Overview

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8RLGoU8RAw>

Introduction

"Yesterday, this painting was worth millions of guilders and experts and art lovers would come from all over the world and pay money to see it. Today, it is worth nothing and nobody would cross the street to see it for free. But the picture has not changed. What has?"

- Hans van Meegeren

Hans van Meegeren: Delusional



- Hans van Meegeren truly believed he was a great painter, but in reality he most certainly was not
- His work was often marred by a "taste" for the excessively sweet or the creepily erotic
- "There [was] too much frivolity, too little depth, too little psychology, too little respect, and no sense of religious feeling."
- "Often insipid and sweet, sometimes miserably forsaken, always weak and powerless."

Sometime after the 1922 show, Van Meegeren started to work on his first forgery

If he could not win the hearts of the critics, then he would find joy by making fools out of them.

The poor quality of Van Meegeren's forgeries is undeniable.

Van Meegeren spent four years working out techniques for making a new painting look old

After solving the great obstacle of getting his oil paint to harden fully, a process that normally takes 50 years to complete, he was ready to begin his forgeries

- Instead of forging the more popular Vermeers, which could be compared to actual works hanging in museums, van Meegeren chose to forge an early religious theme of Vermeer.
- In May 1945 Van Meegeren was arrested. His name had been traced to the sale of *The Woman Taken in Adultery* to Nazi Field-Marshal Hermann Goering.

The Forger is Caught

- The sale consisted of what was then believed to be an authentic Vermeer, and its sale would have constituted the “destruction of Dutch culture.”
- Van Meegeren's defense against the accusation of collaboration, then punishable by death, was that the painting, *The Woman Taken in Adultery*, was not a Vermeer but rather a forgery of his own
- He even claimed to be a national hero, because he had sold his forgeries in exchange for over 200 Dutch paintings

The Trial

- Hans van Meegeren's trial took place in 1947
- "Spurred by the disappointment of receiving no acknowledgements from artists and critics.... I determined to prove my worth as a painter by making a perfect 17th century canvas."
- Van Meegeren declared that having fooled the art world with *Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus*, often considered his best forgery, he was encouraged to paint new forgeries
- He painted a head of Christ, sold it through an intermediary and then "found" the Last Supper for which it was a supposed study



- The court ordered van Meegeren to paint another "Vermeer," *Jesus Among the Doctors*, under supervision of the court, using the techniques and materials he had used for the other forgeries.
- However, upon learning he would be charged with forgery if he finished the painting, he refused to continue working on it.



The Commission



An international group of experts was selected to examine the “Vermeers”

The commission included curators, doctors, and professors from the Netherlands, Belgium and England

Dr. Paul Coremans, director of the chemical laboratory at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium, was appointed the head of this commission

The Investigation

The primary goal: to determine whether the Vermeer paintings in question were indeed forgeries, or whether they were authentic works by the actual artist

The commission examined the various pigments in paints used to determine the authenticity, or lack thereof, of the paintings

Presence or absence of certain chemicals in the pigments would prove whether these paintings were actually painted in the 17th century

Scientific Method and Technique

Examination by Coremans Commission

- Fluorescence, ultraviolet, and infrared examinations
 - Revealed repaints, over-paints, and restorations completed by Van Meegeren
- Microchemical tests of hardness and solubility
 - Confirmed that samples from Van Meegeren's forged paintings did not respond as severely to strong alkalis and acids as seventeenth-century painting samples did

Coremans Commission

- White lead tests: sulfuric acid and vanillin solution
sulfuric
 - Paint layers were found to be duller and more porous than older paintings when samples of white lead were tested
 - X-rays to reveal shortened canvasses and underlying paintings
- Cobalt blue tests: microchemistry and microscopy
 - a modern pigment van Meegeren used in some of his forgeries that could not have possibly been a pigment that Vermeer would have used

Carnegie Mellon Investigation (1967)

X-ray spectroscopy lines

Persistent lines in the reading indicated the presence of cobalt blue and other modern pigments

Lead-210 dating

All paintings contain at least a small amount of Lead-210

The age of a painting can be measured using the half-life formula

Detection of phenoformaldehyde

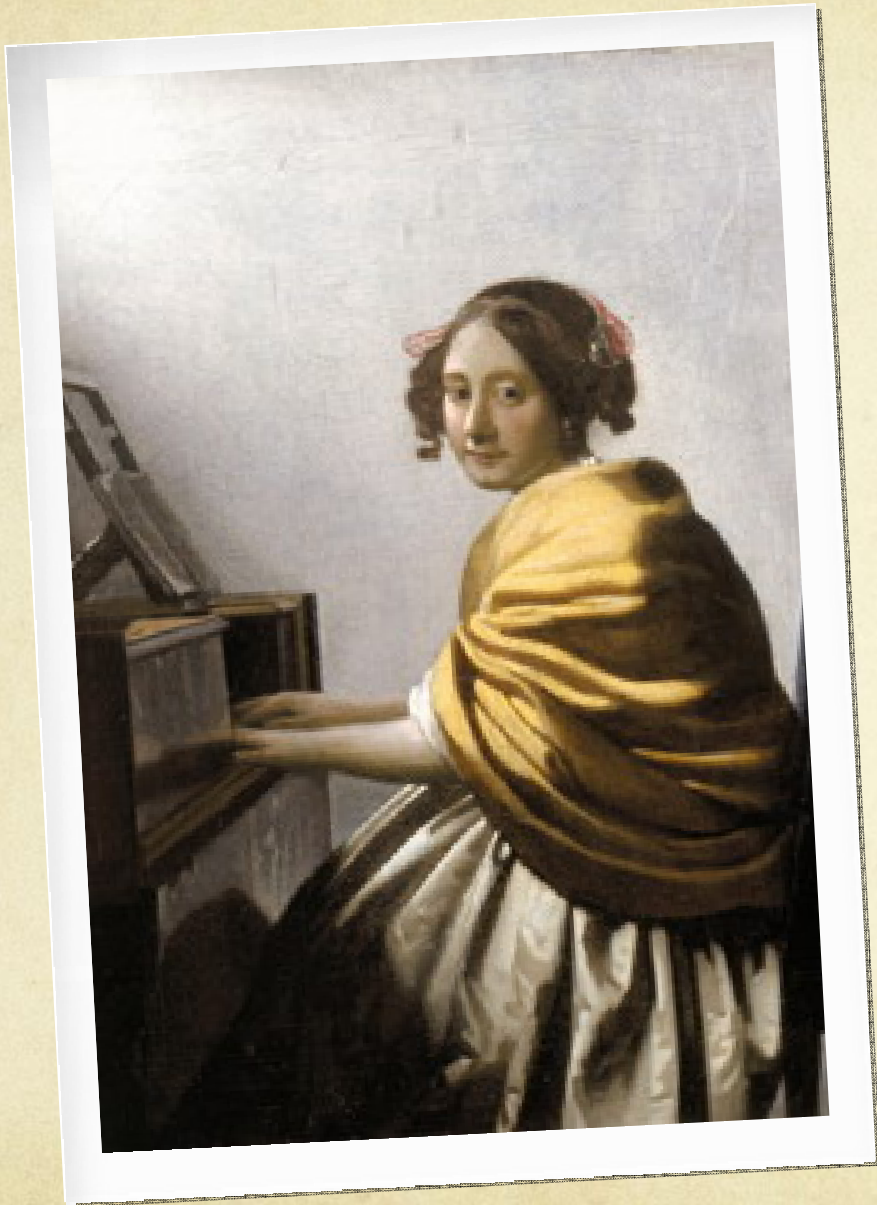
Phenoformaldehyde can now be detected by scientific methods, which Van Meegeren did not think possible

Still, there are doubters...

- Both scientific investigations were able to prove that the paintings were forgeries
- However, some people, notably M. Jean Deceon, still believe some of van Meegeren's forgeries are actual Vermeer paintings



Aftermath



Folk hero to the Dutch people

One of the most successful art forgers ever

Young Woman Seated at Virginals declared original in March 2004